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"No Asians": Digital and National F(r)ictions of Proliferated Life and Queer Subjectivity

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“No Asians”: Digital and National F(r)ictions
of Proliferated Life and Queer Subjectivity

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Asian American Studies

by

Trung P. Nguyen
ABSTRACT OF THESIS

“No Asians”: Digital and National F(r)ictions of Proliferated Life and Queer Subjectivity

by

Trung P. Nguyen

Master of Arts in Asian American Studies
University of California, Los Angeles 2014
Professor Purnima Mankekar, Chair

This thesis explores how queer subjecthood is structured by homonormative investments in national incorporation and proliferated life against unevenly valorized racialized, gendered, and sexualized difference at the same time that the digital has promised to homogenize these differences. I examine visual cultural objects of new media, queer cultural productions, and interfaces of connectivity in order to suggest that the digital colludes with national culture to not only produce and maintain unevenly valorized differences, but to construct a queer subject mobilized to construct, uphold, and repair the modern nation under the vexed rubrics of freedom, rights, and democracy.
The thesis of Trung P. Nguyen is approved.

Victor Bascara

Kyungwon Hong

Purnima Mankekar, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2014
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Introduction:

“No Asians” and the Promise of Incorporation

“With more than 4 million guys in 192 countries around the world -- and approximately 10,000 more new users downloading the app every day -- you’ll always find a new date, buddy, or friend on Grindr.”

- Grindr.com

“Power has no control over death, but it can control mortality. And to that extent, it is only natural that death should now be privatized, and should become the most private thing of all.”

Foucault, Society Must Be Defended

March 25, 2014 marked the fifth anniversary of Grindr’s launch to the general public. On the official blog commemorating the half-decade anniversary, the Grindr Team commented on the impact of their product on the state of gay life, noting that pre-Grindr, “finding other gay men was a real challenge and we’re proud that we can provide the fastest and easiest way to meet a guy. In fact, our users have made millions of connections (and that number is only going up).”

The ever-proliferating millions of connections that the commemorative blog hails is only a rough estimate of its transnational valence – though based in Los Angeles, the app’s user base has been

2 Foucault, Michel. Society Must Be Defended. P. 248.
logged across 4 to 6 million profiles in 192 countries, with “the only countries lacking Grindr action, according to the company, are two of the three least-populated states in the world.” Simultaneously public and private, the app promises a globally generated reservoir of queer bodies readily accessible and mobile at the swipe of one’s fingers.

*Grindr* thus was posited to have ushered in a digitally-mediated modern gay subject characterized by the friction-free movement of gay bodies in a public market of heads, torsos, and profiles stretched across a pocket-sized interface. Here, I note this cultural phenomenon as the *Grindr* moment, where the ease of entering one of these “millions of [gay] connections” formed the fictive and cultural proliferation of gay life, standing in contradistinction to the queer subject once upheld as a figure of death in the face of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Not only is the *Grindr* moment formulated to reorganize queer subjectivities around proliferated life, the imaginative power of the Internet as a space which erases racialized, gendered difference reroutes critical attention away from the continued projects of race and gender in the “post-racial” moment. Since the app’s launch, a handful of (more or less successful) gay social networking clones emerged on the market such as *Jack’d, Scruff, Hornet*, and so on, hoping to capitalize on the convergence of geolocational and mobile data capabilities of smart phones.

Though the five year commemoration of *Grindr* attempts to project a friction-free movement of gay bodies and gay connectivity, racialized and gendered constrictions generated in popular discourse undermine its vision; the fictive power of the *Grindr* moment is not frictionless though it promises to be so as the specters of race and gender linger to haunt it. Where attention to *Grindr* and similar applications have generated a body of popular and scholarly literature invested in an interrogation of how it operates to recondition practices of

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Initially, my interest in this project was to trace the historical and rhetorical underpinnings of the “No Asians” which continually emerged in popular literature. My subsequent investigation of “No Asians,” however, led me to more interesting questions about the encounter of race and sexuality across the interface and cultural production. I found that an investigation of the normative investment in whiteness through which the rhetoric of “No Asians” emerges is conditioned by an investment in the US and the liberal subject. In addition to thinking through why “No Asians” existed in the first place, I found it productive to think through how authors investigating this modality of race constructed a narrative about queer subjectivity through the erasure of difference. Queer subjectivity would erase difference in the name of democracy promised by the modern nation and the emergence of the digital. In these claims, exclusion was posited as the primary injury: exclusion from the traffics of desire, of love, and of romance between individuals – that is, of connectivity and connectedness. Here, I am interested in the slippage of individual exclusion as an injury to “freedom” in relation to the construction of the liberal subject while ignoring its structural forces, where racialized subjects

5 “No Asians” refers to the practice of racial exclusion prominent across gay social networking apps. Similar mantras include: “No Indians” and “No blacks”, and are often coupled in addition to other embodied structures of homonormativity such as “no fats” and “no femmes”.

3
not “free” to choose their partners seek reparation by becoming a subject to this version of freedom. The definition of freedom then is structured by the logics of market choice and trade.

What kind of freedoms are these and how do they elide racialized, sexualized violence? What kind of connections and subjectivities does Grindr enable and encode? Though Grindr CEO Joel Simkhai is careful to note that the app does not replace but rather supplement places of historic gay proliferation (that is, the bar, the bathhouse, or even at home on an online forum), Simkhai hails the modern gay subject as one liberated from spatial constraints. Here, the gay subject is offered “another choice, where you can be online and offline”, with Grindr thereby positioned to remedy the heteronormative public. 6 Where the modern gay subject is pharmaceutically repaired to participate in proliferated life in the contemporary moment (Kane 2009), the gay subject is additionally technologically repaired to succeed where cultural and legal limitations inhibit gay life; the modern gay subject is not only a pharmaceutical one but simultaneously a technologically, digitally mediated subject. Dominant gay culture then is saturated with visions of proliferated life, supplanting prior visions of death and survivability that marked the moment of the HIV/AIDS crisis a decade earlier.

Here, I find Foucault’s description of the biopolitical state to be useful, where power operates to extend and enrich life by staving off death rather than death as something that “suddenly swooped down on life – as in an epidemic” (Foucault 1976). In order to dispel the cultural milieu of the epidemic and to resituate death as “most private of all”, Grindr then emerged at this biopolitical moment where the liberal gay subject cohered into not only digital being but political being as well – a gay subject which was organized around life rather than death and loss. As HIV/AIDS crisis was alleviated by pharmaceutical intervention (however

6 Ibid
primarily for white, middle-class men who can afford such sustained forms of treatment and prophylaxis), *Grindr* proliferated in a cultural milieu where mainstream gay rights political discourse moved away from HIV/AIDS organizing that dominated the late 80’s and the 90’s and now is catalyzed by marriage rights and military inclusion. The political action that the *Grindr* moment hails is one which demands a politics of life through the visibility and incorporation of its liberal subjects.

Lisa Duggan’s work on homonormativity is productive to think through here. According to Duggan, homonormativity restructures politics of intimacy and publicity, unevenly conditioning access to life, rights, and survivability for some queer (especially queer of color) communities while promising liberatory politics for all (2003). What kinds of intimacies are conditioned by homonormativity and how are they performed in service of national culture? What claims to queer life are legible at the expense of violence wrought at the illegible margins? How is queer legibility conditioned in the contemporary moment? How has queerness been framed to supplant race in order to perform the post-racial, modern, liberal nation-state? And how has this performance been enabled by a politics of intimacy and publicity? While colorblind and post-racial politics serves to distance a national past from the ongoing operations of its racist present, the vision of contemporary mainstream queer politics similarly cordons off sexuality from its intersectional irritation with race, gender, and class.

I also find David Eng’s elucidation on queer liberalism to aptly describe the political milieu in which queer subjects find themselves. Eng writes, “queer liberalism marks a particular confluence of political and economic conditions that form the basis of liberal inclusion, rights, and recognitions for particular gay and lesbian US citizen-subjects willing and able to comply with its normative mandates” (Eng 2010). Arguing that gay and lesbian subjects are mobilized
under the fiction of “free and progress,” Eng notes that visions of queer proliferation are structured by a “politics of good citizenship, the conjugal marital couple, and the heteronormative family” (Eng 2010). Interrogating the rhetoric which seeks to antagonize or invest in the *Grindr* moment as it marks the unruly excess of race, gender, sexuality, and class, both make claims that are subsumed under these rubrics of queer liberalism.

At the expense of whose lives is this vision enabled? And what kind of political action compels queer activity in the *Grindr* moment? I am interested in the visions of proliferated queer life and queer subjectivities in the contemporary moment where claims to proliferated queer life and survival are at once a politics of intimacy and publicity as love, sex, and rights saturate contemporary mainstream LGBT discourse in order to supplant previous politics of loss, death, and survivability. At the heart of my interests include how visions of proliferated queer life are structured by a reparative legal and cultural performance which seeks to make commensurate the contradiction of the US nation-state’s service to “equality” and “human rights” as a condition of its existence while at the same time failing to account for the violence it enacts upon racialized and queer of color subjectivities abhorrent to the state and controlled society – racialized, gendered, classed residuals of loss in the present moment. The rhetoric of human rights and equality form the basis of the US cultural fiction as a coherent, cohesive nation that valorizes the very difference it produces. However, the cultural fiction of the US as a coherent entity is in friction with its historical and contemporary deployment of racist and sexist violence enacted upon those very subjects it unevenly valorizes. As Lisa Lowe argues in *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*, the law constructs subjects and subjectionhood as a product of the state and culture. Culture may be read as a site that expresses the contradiction between capital’s necessity of producing differentiated subjects and national culture’s commitment to
homogenization of difference. Following Lowe’s argument, I am interested in attending to both law and culture in order to read how queer of color subjects are constructed and aligned with or against the state.

By analyzing discourse, cultural production, and the legal emergence of marriage as a function of neoliberal logic, I argue that the digital converges with a history of death and loss in order to hail a contemporary homonormative subject, thereby denying the racialized and gendered claims of survivability for queer of color communities. In investigating claims to the proliferated queer subject, I am interested in asking what kind of proliferation is enabled, disciplined, and managed? Although I focus specifically on Grindr, the Grindr moment encompasses any of the apps which facilitate digitally mediated mobile queer subjectivities such as Adam4Adam Mobile, Jack’d, Scruff, and Hornet. All of these applications share an investment in connectivity enabled by the mobile data and geolocational infrastructure of the smartphone and the construction of the homonormative liberal queer subject. I also explore the possibilities of sustaining a radical critique of queer liberalism in the Grindr moment of disciplined subjectivities as actors fail to achieve proper and respectable recognition.

In the first chapter, I situate these questions by providing a literature review of pertinent fields of scholarship. I highlight the interdisciplinarity and intersecting social domains through which the Grindr moment operates – across technology, affect, and visual culture to construct the proliferated, liberal queer subject.

In the second chapter, I highlight the homonormative politics of intimacy across contemporary claims to proliferated queer life. I analyze discourse and provide a reading of two historical court cases surrounding the marriage debate: Loving v. Virginia and Proposition 8, and argue that that these cases resurface to structure proper forms of queer intimacy through
homonormative marriage against the kinds of improper intimacies enabled and suggested via Grindr’s facilitation of connectivity. I point out that neither allows for other possibilities of intimacies to be imagined.

In the third chapter, I focus on the homonormative politics of visibility through a close reading of the app itself and the affects it generates through visual culture. Here, I attend specifically to the interface and its media architecture, with its hidden relationship to capitalism and militarism through data mining and geolocational technology. I consider how the visual and cultural experience of the interface produces the queer subject as a biopolitical one rendered both subject/object to multiple agents and interests.

Finally, I return to consider the question that drove my initial interest in the project: how is the queer liberal subject disrupted by the specter of race as it inheres in the narrative of “no Asians” on Grindr? How is racist action explained away and toward individual vs. structural conditions and what reparations are demanded? How are definitions of queer subjecthood and freedom at stake and what underlying assumptions about queer subjecthood and freedom belie the conditions of “no Asians” on Grindr? I consider the political claims of intimacy and visibility for queer of color subjects – if “no Asians” is the cultural condition that is critiqued, where do I go from there? Does an analysis of “no Asians” ask subjects to re-view their dating preferences so that racialized queers may be incorporated? Or can an analysis of “no Asians” operate to construct political claims that go beyond homonormative incorporation?
Chapter 1:

Visions of Proliferated Life

Though race and sex, and then the digital and the intimate are familiar coupleings, when put together they seem like strange bedfellows. I locate these nodes at the interdisciplinary convergences of science and technology studies, visual cultural studies, affect studies, and queer of color critique, following “connectivity” as a common ground. All are invested in ways that subjects connect and what connective life entails.

As the Grindr moment requires attention to its platform and interface in addition to its subjects, works from science and technology studies and visual cultural studies provide a rich basis to think through code, algorithms, and the utopic promise of the digital. However, code and interface must also be experienced, and thus find its power mobilized by emotion – a feeling of connectivity and proliferated life. Affect studies therefore provides a method to think through how code and interface may structure and mobilize the feeling of proliferated life and its attendant political claims, as homonormative political life is saturated with the rhetoric of love and similitude in its pursuit of incorporation. Finally, attention to queer of color critique provides a method through which to navigate the terrain of homonormativity and to search for radical possibilities and alternatives in the process of disidentification (Muñoz 1999). In all of these works, I chose to specifically focus on those which center the intersectionality of race, sexuality, and gender in its content and method.
Part 1: Science and Technology Studies + Visual Cultural Studies

In contexts where the digital circulates in national and cultural discursive economies as a catalyst through which the “post-racial” America (and ultimately globe) may be ushered, attention to digital culture highlights contradictions of national culture even as it highlights the desires and anxieties of constructing an imagined community (Anderson 1991). An interrogation of the digital and the Internet comes up against a few obstacles, however: the exponential shifts in the configuration of soft and hardware makes a “present” evaluation of the Internet difficult to achieve as the present quickly becomes outdated and re-wired to changing technology; and the intentional hiddenness of digital infrastructure in favor of an innocuous and user-friendly interface operates to erase the racial, gendered, and sexualized (visual and material) capacities of bodies online. The digital then returns us to the politics of intimacy and publicity, as early rhetoric on the Internet promises ultimate visibility (publicity) while at the same time indiscriminate and proliferated connectivity (intimacy). Attention to a troubled history of the Internet reveals how “connectivity” itself is structured by contemporary logics of normative forms of intimate life, which the Grindr moment repeats. Following the troubled nodes of “connectivity” and “visibility” across digital visual that emerge to anchor claims to queer life allows me to ask how digital and visual culture complicates and is complicated by queer politics.

Wendy Chun’s Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics provides a necessary intervention in a troubled genealogy of the Internet. The twin rhetoric of control and freedom that is simultaneously “visible yet unverifiable” structures the shock and unexpectedness of Internet’s inability to exceed the material capacities of race, gender, and sexuality (Chun 2008). Marked by the age of the visible yet unverifiable age of fiber optics,
definitions of freedom are recoded by the logics of contemporary neoliberalism where market choice and trade structures a subject’s relationship to “freedom.” Chun quotes Marx by saying “freedom is meant, under the present bourgeois conditions of production, free trade, free selling and buying” (Chun 11). Chun locates the rhetoric of control and freedom within a geopolitical and national culture of race, gender, and sexuality in order to intervene in literature about the Internet and its infrastructure as that which not only exceeds operations of power but repairs it (such as in writings on the digital divide).

Here, under the axis of “freedom of information” where freedom is structured by neoliberal logics, the digital culture of “visibility” that inheres in a queer politics of publicity enables an accumulation of freedom of information which may not necessarily attend to violence which marks queer lives. What is free to accumulate then is information – metadata, finance, data – to be packaged and moved across and through the market. Queer lives are subject to produce and accumulate this data necessary to stimulate emerging digital and informatics economies. Chun notes that “paranoid narratives of total surveillance and total freedom are the poles of control-freedom, and are symptomatic of a larger shift in power relations form the rubric of discipline and liberty to that of control and freedom”; the age of fiber optics, then, signals a shift in power rather than that which evenly redistributes it (Chun 6). Furthermore, Chun notes that “discourses about sex and sexuality…is symptomatic of larger changes in biopower, and is intimately linked to changes in our understanding of race and changes to racism…for fiber-optic networks threaten a freedom and a democratization that threaten to verge out of control as well as calls for security bent on destroying them” (Chun 15). Hence an understanding of queer politics requires attention to operations of race and racism where both are conditioned by anxieties of control/freedom inherent in the age of fiber optics.
Where Chun’s work highlights the rhetoric of control/freedom which quietly confines the politics of publicity through the operations of a “friction-free capitalism,” Van Dijck attends to the difficult project of writing a “critical history” of social media, thereby speaking to a politics of intimacy, in *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*. Again, since literature on the Internet and the digital must attend to frequent revisions, Van Dijck’s attention to social media could not have been attended to in Chun’s work given the increased proliferation of the Internet in the five years that set their work apart from one another. However, Van Dijck’s work similarly labors to make visible the insidious operations of “visible yet unverifiable” and intuitive yet constructedness of digital code and the Internet, arguing that social media (like the media infrastructure and visual cultures that Chun interrogates) is “embedded in a larger sociocultural and political-economic context where it is inevitably molded by historical circumstances” (Van Dijck 9).

Van Dijck follows another form of conflation enabled by the moment of fiber optics and social media: that of connectedness and connectivity. Noting that “social media are inevitably automated systems that engineer and manipulate connections…the meaning of ‘social’ hence seems to encompasses both human connectedness and automated connectivity – a conflation that is cultivated by many CEOs”, a politics of intimacy in the contemporary moment that inheres in connection and relationality across agents must attend to the manipulatedness of social media. When “human connectedness and automated connectivity” are conflated, the bounds of sociality are vulnerable to slippage with the simulations of the interface; however, it is necessary to note how one may shape the other rather than suggest that one is the other.

Here, connectedness is marketed but necessarily mediated by code, hardware, software, and interface. The human-nonhuman assemblage of relations, which Van Dijck offers instead as
connectivity versus connectedness, operates to collapse the meanings of connectedness within the hidden forms of “friction-free capitalism” that Chun interrogates. Sociality enabled by connectivity then “is not simply ‘rendered technological’ by moving to an online space; rather coded structures are profoundly altering the nature of our connections, creations, and interactions” (Van Dijck 2013).

For example, Van Dijck notes, “normalization occurs detectably, through various levels of adjustments, including technology features and terms of use. But it mostly happens imperceptibly, through gradual transformations of user habits and changing levels of acceptance” (Van Dijck 19). The intimate life of queer communities, enabled by the facilitation of sociality across gay social networking apps, are therefore not immune to the restrictions and conditions of capital and operations of homonormativity. Together, Chun and Van Dijck imagine the body of the Internet, connected by fibers and hardware, where “users” operate as its cells, accumulating and generating ever-proliferating amounts of information through which they may be managed, controlled, and subsequently in/excorporated.⁷ Attention to the interface and its underlying algorithmic and coded processes reveals that the digital is not an unmediated articulation of the nondigital world – how the digital is structured, managed, and presented articulates an interpretation of how the programmer’s vision of the world operates. As Van Dijck notes, the user and the interface then are not in opposition to one another but rather shape how the other is conditioned.

Furthermore, Van Dijck provides a necessary elucidation for national and capitalist investment in the proliferation of social media: that of accumulation. Social media enterprises such as YouTube and Facebook present themselves as innocuous facilitations to a connected life

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⁷ While Chun does not specifically use metaphors of the human body to describe the workings of networked connectivity, Van Dijck writes of “connective tissues” to construct her argument.
while masking its connective capacities. Van Dijck’s analysis of the connective capacities (which she terms as connectivity) calls attention to the hidden operations of accumulation of multiple forms of capital: data, metadata, human, and financial. Van Dijck notes that generated data and metadata on user habits participates in an economy of financialization, where companies may purchase codes and user information in order to the pursuit of targeted marketing via re/designing their applications and interface (Van Dijck 2013). Accumulation of data then generates an accumulation of capital as behavior becomes financialized, with the purpose of users purchasing more commodities. Social media enterprises are then rerouted to one another, as Facebook connects to YouTube connects to Twitter connects to Gmail, where users are both subject and object within an economy of financialized metadata. Similarly, the social networking capacities of gay applications that I am interested in are likewise invested in the accumulation of data, users, and finance. Recalling Chun, the question is not one to incite users against producers, but to see users as producers (of finance, of meta/data, of subjectivities), and producers as users, thereby asking what can be done with this new assemblage of intimacies and relationships between human and data and queerness. Returning to Foucault’s formulation of biopolitics, disciplinary action of the individual is then given over to disciplinary action upon the mass of multiple heads – the population as generated by data and metadata.

What role do racialized and gendered bodies play in the accumulation of data? By providing an extensive analysis of the rhetorical underpinnings of digital discourse and its well-hidden infrastructures as they are sutured to neoliberal operations of power, Van Dijck and Chun imagine a discursively networked human-digital body. Turning to the material, Nakamura in Digitizing Race pays attention to the place of bodies marked by difference across and through the Internet and its connective media. The work of affect (explained further in the next section)
orients racialized and gendered bodies in relation to these visual cultural mediations of the interface and their multivalent assemblages.

Situating the infrastructure of the Internet in a political economy of increasingly neoliberal privatization rather than the democratic utopia hailed by hackers in the 60’s, Nakamura calls attention to the system of visual capitalism which drives the construction of dominant subjectivities. Here, Nakamura refers to visual capitalism as a system of differentiation which structures a racialized, gendered subject’s access to forms of global media. The utopian dream of the hacker paradise is then exceeded by visual capitalism, which unevenly relates racialized and sexualized subjects to global media. As Nakamura notes, new media objects constitute a racial project, wherein “the interface as an object [is] that [which] compels particular sorts of identifications, investments, ideological seductions, and conscious as well as unconscious exercises of power” (Nakamura 17). Tracing the interface, the avatar, and other modalities of visual culture, Nakamura describes women and people of color as “both subjects and objects of interactivity; they participate in digital racial formation via acts of technological appropriation, yet are subjected to it as well” (Nakamura 16). Here, the racialized, gendered, and sexualized body does not get subsumed into a transcendental vision projected by fiber optics and interfaces, but rather operate against it to define its normative capacities and possibilities for resistance. For example, in Nakamura’s analysis of Alllooksame.com, an interactive website which presents a quiz taker with an image of an Asian American and asks them to identify their ethnicity, the user is confronted with the un-truth of racial logic: where the “truth of race is not a visual truth, yet it is one that is persistently envisioned that way. Alllooksame.com is an apparatus that deconstructs the visual culture of race” (Nakamura 81). Where the projection of race enabled by the age of fiber optics requires that race remain squarely within visual cultures
and economies, the failures of identification presents a challenge to this normative paradigm, requiring that the users confront race as it coheres beyond the visual.

Part 2: Affect Studies

An analysis of affect allows a meeting space between animated bodies and their historical situatedness. As homonormativity operates to promise a “demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan 2003), Berlant offers insight as to how homonormativity may mask its operations through her elucidation of cruel optimism. Berlant notes that a relation of cruel optimism exists when:

“the object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or a people risks striving; and doubly, it is cruel insofar as the very pleasures of being inside a relation have become sustaining regardless of the content of the relation, such that a person or a world finds itself bound to a situation of profound threat that is, at the same time, profoundly confirming” (Berlant 2).

The articulation of cruel optimism attends to the multiple sets of attachments which arrange the present – a method which makes visible the attachments that queer lives have to intimacy, visibility, and survival. Here, the object/scene in question may be of the promise of queer “connectivity” conditioned by claims to incorporation and visually-culturally facilitated by the interface of Grindr. Although a proliferated amount of men ready to connect seem to exist on Grindr, the friction conditioned by histories of racism and racialized difference slows the promise of instantaneous connection in the contemporary moment. Where relations of cruel optimism, according to Berlant, are attempts to manage the crises of the present, an analysis of
relations of cruel optimism provides an opportunity to think through the forces that threaten to unravel the present.

Berlant’s writing on impasse and ordinariness approaches the conundrum of race in what is narrated as the post-racial moment. Berlant writes, “the ordinary as a zone of convergence of many histories, where people manage the incoherence of lives that proceed in the face of threats to the good life they imagine.” Here, the ordinary is discussed in an analysis of the “impasse” which is “shaped by crisis in which people find themselves developing skills for adjusting to newly proliferating pressures to scramble for modes of living on.” The impasse, as a method to track the “present”, is a “stretch of time in which one moves around with a sense that the word is at once intensely present and enigmatic, such that the activity of living demands both a wandering absorptive awareness and a hypervigilance that collects material that might help to clarify things” (Berlant 5).

Returning to the proliferation of popular literature on the racial excesses of Grindr, the multiple articles addressing race and online apps which have proliferated on popular online gay and mainstream news sites such as Huffington Post, The Sword, and online campaign End Racism & Homophobia can be read as a collection of impasses. A collection of headlines read:

“No Asian, No Indian: Picky Dater or Racist Dater?”

“Discriminating Against Race on Grindr Doesn’t Make You A Racist”

“Open Letter to Grindr Users: I am Not Rice, He Is Not Curry”

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“Not Just a Preference: The Troubling Terminology of Our Desires”\textsuperscript{11}

These titles suggest a type of management of incoherence encompassed in the specters of race, technology, and sexuality which continually re-emerge in the everyday usage of what is marketed as a innocuous way to connect to local men in one’s immediate geography.

If the ordinary is a “zone of convergence of many histories” that proceed as moments to manage the “incoherence” that threatens the good life imagined, then these articles point to a shared sense of historical and contemporary racism that threatens to disrupt the project of nationalist belonging to a state defined over and against the bodies of racialized communities of color. As these titles suggest, queer subjects which have been positioned to align with national culture face the specter of race in their everyday interactions with the application yet struggle to come to a structural analysis of how and why these moments emerge. These moments of impasse struggle to articulate the causes of racism and debate how race continues to reemerge in the present moment: was not the specter of racism overcome in our post-Civil Rights America?

While Berlant works through affect as an encounter with crisis in the general, Raj attends specifically to the encounter of race and sexuality. Affect forms the basis of Raj’s encounter with race and whiteness in “Grindring Bodies: Racial and Affect Economies of Online Queer Desire.” A foremost and welcome critical analysis of race and sexuality in its online capacities, Raj notes the contradiction of online technologies in the proliferation and regulation of intimacy and subjectivity (Raj 2011). Though on one hand Grindr may enable “new forms of sexual subjectivity and queer sociality,” whiteness comes to affectively manage nonwhite bodies as


either “fetish or repugnant others” (Raj 10). Following Ahmed’s work on orientations, Raj notes that whiteness “is a proximate point from which the subject can orient himself or herself” wherein whiteness “shapes how we act and inhabit space, bringing objects into our reach, depending on our ability to ‘move’ through this space” (Raj 9). Thus, I find Raj’s insights to be critical in theorizing Grindr’s relationship to affect and the encounter of race. I wish to extend these insights by situating the encounter of race within a structure of normative investments upheld by claims to national incorporation.

Part 3: Queer of Color Critique

An analysis of science and tech studies and visual culture offers methods through which to consider the racialized and gendered depths of code, interface, and infrastructure. Affect offers a method to think through how bodies are differently positioned to life and survivability through an analysis of attachment and intimacy, including attachments to promises offered by technology and ushered in through visual culture. However, queer of color critique is necessary in order to approach these multiple attachments as a space to reimagine the multiple possibilities and alternatives which may antagonize the state while operating within it. The incoherence detected through affect is readily embraced in queer of color critique as a strategic political method to confront the state which conditions it.

Queer of color critique, according to Ferguson, “eschews the transparency of all these formulations and opts instead for an understanding of nation and capital as the outcome of manifold intersections that contradict the idea of the liberal nation-state and capital as sites of resolution, perfection, progress, and confirmation” wherein culture is understood as “a site of
identification [that] produces such odd bedfellows and how it – as the location of antagonisms – fosters unimagined alliances” (Ferguson 3). Queer of color critique then attends specifically to the intersecting operations of race, gender, class, and sexuality which inform social relationships, structures, and practices, questioning the claims to state incorporation and recognition that queer liberalism strives to make (Eng 2010).

As homonormative claims to incorporation are predicated on marriage and military, the site of identification then is sexuality and normative investments in domesticity, home, and family. Queer of color critique troubles this mode of identification by attending to its intersecting operations of race, class, and gender as well, and demands attention to its relationship with the normative capacities of the nation and capital. As mainstream claims to proliferated queer life locate the nation-state as a site of “resolution, perfection, progress, and confirmation,” a queer of color analysis intervenes in these modes of identification, complicating their political claims of discreteness. Insofar as political animatedness toward marriage is about sexuality, it is also about race, gender, and class. One key task of queer of color analysis then is the work of disidentification. Forwarded by Muñoz, the project of disidentification does not position minority subjectivity outside the cultural field in which it is marginalized, but rather within it (Muñoz 1999). Working within social constructions, disidentification and queer of color analysis supplements the two previous sections by attending to the materiality of race, gender, sexuality, and class and asking how their minoritized positions within a cultural field of power may imagine new subjectivities.

Queer of color analysis then shifts the question of connectivity towards asking what kinds of normative investments does the Grindr moment conspire with and what kinds of normative investments might it antagonize – as queer of color analysis notes that both investment and
antagonization proliferate across culture. Returning to the accumulation of metadata and subjects of capital generated by social media enterprises, how do minoritized positions rethink and recode the process of accumulated data and its investment in generating normative positions and knowledge?

Here, I turn to an investigation of the two cultural economies that collude with queer liberalism: of proliferated visibility through an analysis of visual culture and interface, and of respectable intimacy through an analysis of race and sexuality in claims to marriage.

Conditioned by the trauma of loss which cohered in queer politics in the HIV/AIDS moment, the Grindr moment extends the stakes of gay social networking beyond innocuously facilitating communication. Turning to an analysis of visual culture as Nakamura does in Digitizing Race, I ask how the interface of gay social networking facilitates a vision of queer proliferation as a flourishing population is haunted by loss and marked by racial and gendered difference. Although Grindr forms the main focus of the visual analysis, the application follows a similar interfaced design as other gay social networking applications listed earlier. I ask how both the media infrastructure and software which enables gay social networking is enabled by the conditions of militarized violence and surveillance while at the same time hiding these insidious operations in order to pursue a politics of recognition at the expense of violent militarism worldwide. Not only does the interface of the application project a vision of a proliferated gay population set in temporal and affective distance to a vision of atrophied gay population during the HIV/AIDS epidemic, but enables a vision of global mobility as well. Connectivity envisions a queer subject seeking recognition not just locally but one that may move globally as well.

Turning to an investigation of respectable and proper intimacies, claims to marriage works to incorporate queer subjects into liberal homonormativity. The emergence of Grindr and
other gay social networking applications also highlights anxieties about unruly intimacies – thus, *Grindr* is culturally anchored as its opposite in order to discipline it as an analysis of documentary series *The Grindr Guide* demonstrates. While characters in the documentary series approach the possibility of a radical critique of queer liberalism in the failure to achieve recognition, dangerous intimacies get re-oriented toward normative visions of intimacy that is globally consumable. An analysis of Israeli couple Yuval and Liran’s efforts to fund their effort to have an adopted child after encountering state and surrogate failure demonstrates the global import of homonormativity. The political claim undergirding Yuval and Liran’s struggle is one of failure to incorporate and be properly recognized by states. However, as both are then oriented toward normative investments in queer liberal proliferation – whether monogamously or polyamorously – neither account for the possibilities of intimacies that extend beyond the homonormative though they may gesture toward it.

As Puar notes in a rereading of the *Lawrence v. Texas*\(^\text{12}\) case, “a generative project of liberalism, the purportedly liberating process of deregulation inaugurates yet again the multiplication of pools of knowledge – particularization, minutiae, what Hunter terms ‘heightened scrutiny’ – of queer bodies…liberalism works through the positive register of incorporation” (Puar 114). Where liberalism ushers in a deregulated subject, it only multiplies the ways that a body may be scrutinized, as a subject is incorporated into the biopolitical state. Queer of color critique contends itself with these multiplied pools of knowledge and asks how it may recode them to identify emergent cultural positions of minoritized subjects.

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\(^{12}\) *Lawrence v. Texas* ruled to decriminalize homosexual relations between consensual adults.
Chapter 2:
The Fictive Power of Queer Proliferation

“Once new technologies and their use have gained a naturalized presence, it is much harder to identify underlying principles and thus question their raison d’être. Hence, new norms for sociality and values of connectivity are not the outcome but the very stakes in the battle to conquer the vast new territory of connective media and cultivate its fertile grounds.”

-Van Dijck, The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media

“The right to look confronts the police who say to us, ‘Move on, there’s nothing to see here.’ Only there is, and we know it and so do they.”

-Mirzoeff, The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality

Several thousand miles away in Saigon, Vietnam, the profile of one Vietnamese man writes, “I am looking for a long term relationship, I am not a rent boy.” The profile of another only two miles away from my apartment in Westwood, Los Angeles writes, “looking for a masculine, fit, MAN. Not into Asian/black.” Though separated by five thousands of miles of ocean and land, the space between these two men become collapsed into a five second scroll of my fingertips. From my apartment in Koreatown, Los Angeles, I can geolocate bodies all around the world from the interface of Jack’d, a Grindr-like gay social networking application. And at any moment in the dense city of Los Angeles, signing into Grindr will reveal innumerable
amounts of men within a one-mile radius across the app’s interface, actively searching (or passively waiting) for physical, emotional, or other forms of intimacy.

Although online sites of gay social networking have been around for as long as online dating sites have existed, global positioning systems have shifted the grounds of queer connectivity. In this section, I focus on the very object and interface of gay social networking itself. I am interested in uncovering how the interface operates to produce racialized, gendered queer subjects conditioned by queer liberalism while coding these as “natural” processes of modern sociality. As I describe the two profiles of men on the gay social networking application above, these private yet public interactions are spatial sites where race, gender, and sexuality are reified and rearticulated, and cannot be viewed isolated from the (racialized, gendered, computational) codes which condition their expression. Through a reading of the visual interface of gay social networking applications, I seek to articulate how code and satellites along with imported visions of race, gender, and sexuality constitutes the imaginative power of visuality. Attention to visuality and the visual field of the interface notes the deliberate construction of queer proliferation as a “natural” consequence of modern time, and a re-reading of these sites may afford the possibility to change, reassemble, and recode minority positions and subjectivities in defiance of normative visions of proliferation. As Van Dijck notes about social media, the norms of subjectivity and intimacy are the very stakes of the interface and infrastructure of connectivity, not merely a natural outcome or a mirrored reflection of reality. But first, how do social media interfaces and technologies demand authority over the norms of subjectivity and intimacy?
The Viral Interface

A brief description on the capacities of the interface: geolocation-based gay social networking sites like the ones I mention above follow a similar interface and agreement protocols. Once the application has been downloaded onto a smartphone, tablet, or other supported device, the user must agree to the terms of service and privacy policies of the application in order to continue. After doing so, one is asked to create a profile for oneself where one is asked to input data that identifies height, weight, age, race and ethnicity, likes/dislikes, and anything else they would like to publicly communicate to other users. It is in this section of “About” or “About Me” where the racialized epithets of “No Asians/Indians/Blacks/etc.” are inputted and observed. Users are then asked to upload a few photos of themselves, with the option of keeping some private where they may grant individually permission for others to see. Some interfaces may ask users to identify with a particular subculture within gay social life – for example “Muscle”, “Twink”, “Bear”, “Friends Only”, “Long-Term Relationship (LTR)”, “Kink”, and so on – and some apps are specifically designed with a particular subculture in mind. From here, profiles often are arranged in a grid-like structure, where users can scroll and click to view men who are within a certain geographical radius. However, the interface is aesthetically constructed (I have yet to encounter a specifically gay social networking application which has not arranged itself in this grid format), most will allow filters to control the type of profile that the user might demand to see – arranged by height, weight, race or ethnicity, and/or gay subcultural identification.

13 While photos are not scrutinized right after immediate uploading, profiles may be reported for inappropriate or falsified material.
While the geolocationality of gay social networking applications are enabled by technologies of global positioning systems, some interfaces allow greater control over their geolocationality while others are much more strict with them. For example, Grindr only allows the user to view the profiles of men who are within the immediate vicinity that one’s smartphone GPS can detect, displaying the closest 40 other profiles (although purchasing an upgraded version of Grindr will allow a user more control over these preferences). Other applications like Jack’d allow users the option of browsing within the immediate vicinity or pinpointing a location on a map where they would like to browse the grids of user profiles signed onto Jack’d located in that particular part of the world. Currently, there is no unified or aggregated system of gay social networking; in order to view users across different platforms, users must download that respective application. Users are allowed to have multiple profiles across multiple platforms.

Whether the application allows the greater/lesser control over their geolocationality, the interface relies upon a vision of proliferating masses of users and profiles in order to sustain itself. As Nakamura notes, the profile/avatar that appears on the interface indexes an actual body existing somewhere in space. When one signs onto the interface, the experience of viewing suggests that there are ever growing quantities of profiles to be viewed and thus an ever growing amount of gay men to possibly connect to that exist in a given locality. Scrolling plays a key role in this mechanism, as a user scrolls down the interface in order to make appear more and more profiles. There is a price for the experience of proliferation: this experience of scrolling is teased by the limit that the application places on a user as a condition of being an initially free application to download. In order to view more profiles, to consume more images and information, the user must pay a premium subscription. As the tendency of new technologies is to transition into that of the mundane, everyday, thereby hiding the conditions of its existence,
the experience of making visible profiles of gay men within one’s locality (or even around the world) turns the visual cultural experience of queerness towards life and its extension rather than that of death which peaked during the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Grindr, like other gay social networking applications, emphasizes in their marketing material that its mission is for individuals come to meet “in real life”, making these online “connections” appear offline; that is, for users to ultimately become “0 feet away.” The fictive power of proliferation is the promise of connection, where the process of translating interfaced digital intimacies into in-person intimacies rendered as natural and a guarantee encourages the user to continue to use the application and thereby sustain its existence. The interface exists to not only facilitate (mediated) communication, but also to facilitate the accumulation of data and capital as the user becomes enmeshed in a web of enforced decision choices and advertisements. Where finance is generated through the clicking of ads and the selling of metadata, the user is not just a passive user of the interface, as Van Dijck would note, but also one who produces content that accumulates – of information, images, finance, metadata, and data. Connectivity with the interface not only move bodies across space and time, as the mantra of “0 feet away” strictly turn its attention to, but connectivity also indexes modes of accumulation and financialization as mediated interactions become translated into image, data, and metadata. In order to sustain accumulation, the interface must reconfigure imaginations of sociality towards that of life and its proliferation, compensating for loss and death (of user/producers, of data, of finance) by generating an endless supply of bodies easily replenished. Attending to the demand for data and its attached process of financialization notes that the gay social networking interface necessitates the mass replenishment of bodies and accumulation of its data, making absent the conditions of death which queer subjects may face.
What the interface is invested in making visible then is life and its proliferation in order to replenish its userbase, relegating the conditions of violence upon queer of color subjects that occur in the current moment into the margins as a concern which cannot constitute contemporary sociality. As queer liberalism reconfigures the imagination of death and violence as it seeks political relief through state incorporation (without attending to the necropolitical operations that maintain the state itself), the interface likewise reconfigures imaginations of death and violence as profiles populate the interface in an infinite scroll, allegedly indexing actual infinite bodies in reality. Virality then is of queer proliferation, rather than of queer death.

![Figure 1: Interface of Grindr.](image)

Optic Power of Racial Taxonomy and Visuality

The authority that the interface commands over connectivity and intimacy is encompassed in social media’s assemblage of visuality. Mirzoeff argues in *The Right to Look* that the complex of visuality is the systemic, institutional, and ideological assemblage which
conditions a social problem to exist as a legitimate object of inquiry and subject of recognition. Beyond merely the phenomenological experience of sight, visuality is assembled from vast amounts of information, images, and ideas in order to frame a relationship with history and the contemporary moment as the “normal” and “everyday,” thereby conditioning the social relations of actors embedded within it. The ability to construct an assemblage of visualization is intimately entwined with operations of discursive and material power, as it “manifests the [exclusive] authority of the visualizer” wherein authority is “visibly able to set things in motion and that is then felt to be right.” Subjectivity enabled by the field of visuality is a twinned process where one requires and produces the Other: one which legitimates the figure of authority and one which is being visualized. Here, queer subjects are visualized and the interface assembles the conditions of visuality. The visuality of conditions ushering in death and loss that haunted queer subjects during the HIV/AIDS moment and continue to haunt racialized queer of color subjects today are relegated to the most private margins – too private for the interface to code, too defiant to be witnessed.

Where the complex of visuality operates to “classify by naming, categorizing, and defining a process defined by Foucault as ‘the nomination of the visible’” as Mirzoeff notes, the interface of the Grindr moment likewise structures and organizes indexed bodies within the complex of visuality (Mirzoeff 3). The gridded interface offers a panoptic view of queer subjects, as users willingly enter the panopticon of the interface and classify themselves according to the values designated as nominable by the interface – that is, by race and subculture. Where naming, categorizing, and defining race within the nomination of the visible across the interface operates to thus “separate and segregate those it visualizes” into scrutinized and measured units, its effect is to “make this separated classification seem right and hence aesthetic” (Mirzoeff 3). Reduction
of difference to the realm of the aesthetic erases the conditions and history of exploitative capital that necessitated racialized labor in the first place.

Hence, the emergence of “No Asians” rhetoric and its attendant legitimation as “merely a preference” is a residual of the complex of visuality, where race across the interface may only be understood as aesthetic as a result of naming, categorizing, and defining. The complex of visuality scrambles and reimagines the conditions of minoritized subjectivities in order to prevent (or in this case restrict) the possibilities of political subjectivity. Placing race within the discursive economy of the aesthetic makes “natural” the production of difference, erasing historical and contemporary conditions of violence and labor wrought over and against racialized subjects.

Attention to the technology of the Grindr moment as it produces racialized subjects as aesthetic subjects must also attend to the satellites which enable its geolocational capacities. The geolocational capacities of the interface in the Grindr moment not only makes dis/appear local queer bodies within the complex of visuality but makes dis/appear global bodies. As Lisa Ann Parks notes in *Cultures in Orbit*:

“In cultural theory the satellite has been missing in action, lying at the threshold of everyday visibility and critical attention, but moving persistently through orbit, structuring the global imaginary, the socioeconomic order, and the tissue of everyday experience across the planet…this blindness is not innocent, for it reveals that the military-industrial-information complexes of the West have been quite effective at concealing and using their most strategic technologies to assume global domination in the post-cold war period, managing to avert the critical gaze in the process” (Parks 7).
The interface of the *Grindr* moment, then, projects a rational vision of the world enabled by the presence of geolocationality and satellites – one marked by progress, ultimate global visuality, and aestheticized queer proliferation around the world. Encompassed by Grindr’s tagline of making appear “4 million men in 192 countries”, the nomination of the visible extends itself globally, hiding the conditions zones of war and violence in favor of visions of queer life and proliferation.

Reading the social media interface as a natural process, as Van Dijck warns, then recapitulates the authoritative power of visuality. Paying attention to how the interface assembles visuality, the interface indexes a relationship to society and projection of contemporary sociality entrenched in multiple complexes that seek to make hidden the violence of racism and militarism to its user/producers. Here, I turn to the political possibilities and subjectivities that the interface does enable – that of queer liberalism which cannot name race as a historical and ongoing condition of queer life and death.
Chapter 3.
Scenes of Dangerous Intimacy

“While in prior decades gays and lesbians sustained a radical critique of family and marriage, today many members of these groups have largely abandoned such critical positions, demanding access to the nuclear family and its associated rights, recognitions, and privileges from the state.

That such queer liberalism comes at a historical moment of extreme right-wing nationalist politics should give us immediate pause.”

Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz, What’s Queer about Queer Studies Now?

“The idea behind Grindr for Equality is to harness this huge global network -- all of you -- to do some amazing work for GLBT equality and to advance the cause of our community worldwide.

Simply put, let’s use Grindr to organize and fight for our rights.”

-Grindr For Equality

In 2011, Grindr launched a campaign with the intent to politically mobilize its growing userbase. Grindr for Equality, a polished and less scantily clad section of their website, was ushered in as a response to the growing userbase and to meet the ethical demand that Grindr could do more with its access. Noting that “more than 4 million guys have become Grindr users in just three years, and thousands of new guys are joining Grindr every day”, the campaign positions itself as an innocuous, natural response to an increasingly politicized milieu. Grindr as an organizing tool to “fight for our rights” is “simply put”, with Grindr for Equality recalling the language of connectivity and mobilization only possible through its application – it will “enable”
its users to put the platform to use for “greater good”\textsuperscript{14}. A few campaigns backed by Grindr for Equality archived on their Twitter account\textsuperscript{15} reveal an overwhelming emphasis to US-based political demands to marital inclusion with an increased amount of attention to Uganda, India, and Russia.\textsuperscript{16} Positioned in the rhetoric of substantive, transformative change, campaigns through Grindr for Equality are those that Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz note of queer liberalism: incorporation and recognition by the state.

Participation in the campaign is at once compulsory and voluntary, generating a vision of freedom and choice within a larger set of interfaced system trees. Utilizing its geolocational capacities, Grindr for Equality aggregates petitions, campaigns, and actions pertinent to its vision of liberal gay rights that may be going on in the area. The aggregated actions are then projected to the user in between a series of advertisements for hotels, plastic surgery, or nearby happy hours that the user compulsorily navigates as soon as they sign onto the application. While locality is privileged, so too are international cases of affronts to liberal LGBT incorporation. Campaigns are almost exclusively organized around inter/national incorporation – marital, legal, corporate, political. The user is then compelled to take an action – learn more about the campaign at hand where the user will be redirected to a page detailing the political urgency or hit “cancel” thereby allowing the user to move on to navigate the bevy of advertisements that flash across the screen before being able to enter the intended interface of the application.

\textsuperscript{15} The campaign’s Twitter account can be found at <twitter.com/Grindr4equality>.
\textsuperscript{16} These particular sites noted increased attention in the project of gay liberalism worldwide, as Uganda was highlighted for its anti-homosexuality bill, Russia’s anti-gay laws were highlighted while it hosted the Sochi Olympics, and India’s recriminalization of sodomy as it reinstated Section 377. While a critique of geopolitical and racialized positions were obviously ignored, Grindr 4 Equality found the offense here to be the inability for homosexuals to properly incorporate into their respective nations.
In either case, as both “Learn More” and “Cancel” allow the illusion of voluntary involvement in a political campaign, users are already implicated in its economy in two ways: since the ad and/or political news will always show up (unless an advanced subscription is purchased to alleviate its frequency) and, whatever choice the user makes, the option used will be noted and logged for in the accumulation of metadata. Though the user is offered some control over what they are exposed to (more ads, participation in the campaign, and so on), the user is also always incorporated into the software of the program which, as van Dijck notes, transforms the program itself; the deed is done, what happens after the moment of accumulation is of little concern to the application’s designer. As written in Grindr’s privacy policy (and similar to most other gay social networking applications), “personal data” is used to identify, improve, provide services, respond to inquiries, send promotional material, fulfill product/service purchases, and/or conduct partnered promotions. Additionally, metadata is trafficked and managed across advertising and analytic partners such as Google Analytics in order to “improve advertising services” and user interfaces. User connectivity then is desired to accumulate metadata and further incorporation into the national body and capitalist economy.

If, as Chun notes, the insidious role of the interface is to make invisible its infrastructure of algorithmic mediation and regulation of bodies and experiences, the Grindr for Equality campaign operates within a discursive economy which hides the mediation of the interface in

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17 The full wording listed in Grindr’s privacy policy notes that data is used to “(a) to identify you as a user on the Grindr Service; (b) to improve the Grindr Service; (c) to provide the services you request, including the Grindr Service; (d) to respond to your inquiries related to support, employment opportunities or other requests; (e) to send you Promotional Emails (defined below) if you opted in to receiving them at the time of registration for the Grindr Services or otherwise subsequently agreed to be included on our mailing lists; (f) to fulfill a product or service purchase; and (g) to conduct a Partner Promotion that you voluntarily entered into as described below.”
order to meet the demand to liberal ethical action. The campaign “harnesses” an already available population, thereby homogenizing and flattening difference in order to identify subjects defined discretely as sexual subjects.

What is the investment in disciplined intimacies? Here, Grindr posits political organizing as the natural extension to a vision of an ever-proliferating gay public while at the same time generating an investment in disciplinary and normative intimacies. An analysis of campaigns forwarded by Grindr for Equality notes the will to discipline unruly sexuality and intimacies that the app may enable. If, as Puar notes, a project of liberalism works through incorporation and generates “heightened scrutiny” of queer bodies, so too does the inter/national demand to deregulate marriage produce heightened scrutiny of queer subjects across the axis of intimacies that must be disciplined in the face of digitally mediated unruliness. It is no coincidence that Grindr 4 Equality emerges as a necessary strategy to maintain its hold on claims to proliferated gay life – in order to maintain its growing user base (and therefore its corporative life in both the sense of capitalist accumulation and bodily accumulation), it must quell fears that unruly intimacy may present. Unruly intimacies present a threat to the body of the modern liberal queer subject in the Grindr moment. Here, I think of unruly intimacies to refer to formations of relational life that disinvest in or threaten hetero/homonormative structures of normative domesticity.

The fear which accompanies these unruly intimacies is in part formed by the imagined (and empirical) fear of contagion as a residual from a politics of loss that cohered during the HIV/AIDS crisis. As Raj notes that online technologies may offer the space for unforeseen subjectivities and intimacies, the question that is then posed is what proliferates if these unruly
intimacies remain undisciplined? One unintended proliferation was an increase in the transmission of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

As noted in a number of cases generated by the US Center for Disease Control on gay social networking applications, research generated on men who have sex with men (MSM) who meet their partners through geosocial networking apps coincided with 45 percent increase in HIV in MSM – an implied collateral of unruly intimacy (Community Healthcare Network in New York City 2011). Similarly, in work presented by Rudy et al., preliminary data suggested “STI prevalence is higher among MSM using GSN [gay social networking] applications compared with non-internet/non-GSN users.” The ethical call made by Rudy et al. is inconclusive, suggesting that “increased surveillance” on the population is recommended to generate further knowledge (Rudy et al. 2012). Under scrutiny is the queer body as geosocial applications increases its exposure to sexually transmitted infections, thereby recalling a politics of loss through the affect of contagion.

Though this too generates multiple pools of knowledge, as increased (presumably “scientific”) surveillance is called to better visualize and discipline the queer body. In order to properly discipline this the contagious queer body then, Grindr 4 Equality serves to forward a secondary function of connectivity: that of harnessing political activity in order to condition properly liberal queer subjects. Noting Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz’s critical analysis of queer studies in their 2005 Fall-Winter edition of Social Text, the political projects which proposed by Grindr For Equality are less a radical critique of family and marriage but rather a symptom of queer liberalism that seeks state recognition and incorporation. At the same time the Grindr moment may enable unthought-of intimacies and queer subjectivities, queer liberalism disciplines the threatening political claims that may emerge through unruly intimacies. The
homonormative subject of marriage is then produced at the expense of the multiply intimate, contagious queer.

To trace the conditioning of queer liberal subjects across the axis of intimacy, I start with a reading of the demand to access state recognition via marriage. The passing of *Loving v. Virginia* by the US Supreme Court in 1967 benchmarks a moment in national consciousness marked by the convergence of minority oppositional politics, the Civil Rights movement, and the position of the state in relation to the legislation and management of public and private lives. Maillard and Villazor’s edited collection *Loving v. Virginia in a Post-Racial World: Rethinking Race, Sex, and Marriage* considers the multiple legacies of *Loving v. Virginia* and how the case is resurfaced to mobilize the politics of intimacy across race and sexuality. Although the anthology considers the normative operations of *Loving v. Virginia* (as in the section on limits to *Loving*), the pieces posit a vision of the liberal subject through state incorporation, offering little space to consider alternatives to incorporation. For example, in “Love at the Margins: Racialization of Sex and the Sexualization of Race”, Nelson makes a claim to respectability in contradistinction to un-respectable figures – porn stars and those marked by sexual excess. While Nelson seeks to ask what the limits of *Loving v. Virginia* may be for racialized subjects, Nelson does so at the expense of disciplining proper forms of intimacy. Although the anthology makes a noble attempt to consider the normative operations of *Loving v. Virginia* (as in the section on limits to *Loving*), the pieces continue to operate under a framework of correspondence and homogenized difference where *Loving v. Virginia* = Proposition 8.

In contrast, Chandan Reddy’s piece “A Time for Rights?” in Hong and Ferguson’s edited anthology *Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization* starts off with the problematic functions of commemorating *Loving v. Virginia* for the purpose of
revitalizing same-sex marriage. Reddy argues that the resurgence of Loving v. Virginia in gay marriage rhetoric operates to condition both within the framework of liberal incorporation and state recognition rather than sustaining a radical critique of terms of incorporation. Positing that “race and gender are the critical cultural remainders of a modernity forcible made ambiguous and temporarily resolved through the substantive subsumption of marriage into a right”, Reddy asks queer politics to consider the function of commemoration as a “preservation of a modern feeling of personhood founded in racial typology” (Reddy 2013). Though marriage presents one form of intimacy tied to state rights and recognition (thus, proper intimacy), the political life of intimacy is opened up in Frank, Clough, and Seidman’s edited anthology *Intimacies: A New World of Relational Life*.

In a turn towards analyzing the proliferated forms of intimacy itself, Frank, Clough, and Seidman’s anthology on intimate life is the effort to bring together psychic and social dimensions of intimacies in America today. Noting that literature on intimacies was marked by a distinctive “divide between the social and psychological,” *Intimacies* constructs an anthology on intimate life which grounds the psychic life of relationality in its social and historical conditions. As the contemporary moment opens up new terrains for intimate relations to cohere across fluid and thick intimacies, these authors ask what the “agentic possibilities and also its role in a politics of control and exclusion” may be. Central to their analysis is the conceptualization of intimate citizenship, noting that:

“Anglo-Western European cultures have articulated a new concept of rights, that of *intimate citizenship*. In principle, selves have a right to personal intimate freedom with regard to partner selection, the social form of intimacy, and its internal organization. Although this right is becoming an important part of the search for personal freedom and
happiness, we are also aware that it has been applied unevenly and excludes or
inferiorizes many nonheterosexuals, gender-different folk, immigrants and the disabled,
among others.” (4)

As the authors argue what is at stake in an “age of ever-expanding, mutually negotiated
relationships” is “intimacy that is at the heart of relational life” rather than historically bounded
institutions of strict relational ties such as marriage, family, or gender roles, intimate citizenship
then emerges as a discourse through which individuals navigate and imagine their relations to
each other. Though this is not to say that intimate citizenship replaces these previous relational
ties, but rather intimate citizenship allows a grammar through which to think of emerging
relational forms, having been informed and conditioned by the previous institutional lives. The
discourse on relationality (with one another, with others, with nonhuman objects, with the past,
and with a future to be lived) is saturated with a vexed relationship with proper intimacy. With
this in mind, I read the documentary series The Grindr Guide as a cultural object that embraces
the possibility of unruly intimacy but recodes its possibilities for critique by conditioning the
proper queer liberal subject, thereby working to discipline unruly intimacies as it is generated.

Grindr Guide

An eight-part series of two to five minute shorts, The Grindr Guide follows a cast of gay
men as they search for connections on Grindr. Set in Sydney, Australia, the series presents itself
as a documentary to help men navigate through the phenomena of Grindr in the construction of
queer community formation. In addition to the introduction and the finale, each episode is
focused and titled after a local node of gay social networking preoccupation and activity: “Sex”,

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“The Profile Pic”, “Race”, “The Date”, “The Aftermath”, and “Body Image”. While the series follows a brief storyline of about 3-4 recurring characters (aside from one who identifies as Asian, all are white gay men in their 20’s), the narrative is interrupted with interview clips from gay social networking application users all around Sydney, facts and statistics about gay social networking, and critical perspectives on the phenomena (including from Raj, whose work on affect, race, and whiteness on Grindr I mention earlier). All these men are characterized as modern, liberal gay subjects who are simply seeking love, connectivity, and meaning with the help of (or obstacle of) Grindr. Additionally, Grindr and its CEO are credited as official backers and supporters of this project.

In episode 5 entitled “The Date”, viewers are introduced to the character Joel. Described as the “resident romantic,” Joel begins his storyline by noting, “deep down, I’m such the hopeless romantic. I’m in love with Disney, that’s why I wanted to work for them. I’m waiting for that whole story. It’s all I want, a really good story.” What constitutes this “good story”? Joel goes on to note that what constitutes his Disney love story would be “have some sort of mini-long relationship” that lasts longer than “six weeks.” We learn little other of the character’s past or context other than this fact of his intimate history – his relationships with other men were short, fleeing, and (we are led to assume) unfulfilling. Without interrogating the conditions of fleeting intimacy or its radical possibilities, the “good story” Joel seeks then is defined as a proper, normative one for queer liberalism. Though he describes this vision as little other than lasting longer than “six weeks”, the rest of the series shapes what proper intimacy is not, presenting a conundrum for the intended purpose of the app. How can Grindr deliver on the

promise of achieving normative intimacies for the queer liberal subject even as failure to achieve this intimacy is experienced as an everyday action?

The promise of homonormative intimacy structures Joel’s everyday life. Like a fisherman collecting his keep, Joel “goes to bed with Grindr on, and in the morning checks to see what falls into his Grindr net”. The potential of achieving normative intimacy then motivates Joel’s persistence on the application, fulfilling additionally the platform’s demand to generate and accumulate usage and data. With the possibility of ever-proliferating gay men appearing across the interface of the app, Joel continues to click, scroll, and commit himself into its soft/hardware infrastructure in pursuit of finding that normative incorporation. The possibility of using the app for other purposes which may valorize unruly intimacies – such as those forwarded by sex positive positionality19 – are foreclosed to write the “good story” of romance coded as normative partnership. Recalling Berlant’s formulation of relations of cruel optimism, the relation between Joel and the app may be described as cruel. The possibility of achieving normative intimacy however allows the app to be re-written as respectable, and it is this possibility of respectability that sustains Joel’s usage of the app (and its motivation to accumulate users and user data) while at the same time refusing a critique of incorporation and normativity in the first place.

Joel’s efforts are productive, however, after he connects with a Canadian man on the app who he had noticed in person before. The rest of the episode follows his weeklong journey with this emergent intimacy: what will it become and will he finally the story he (and queer liberalism) desires? Though the relation begins well with a date, Joel soon agonizes over a lack of contact from the Canadian. Two, three, four days pass until Joel works up the nerve to message him again, leading to a lackluster conversation. Joel is clearly dejected in the face of his

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19 Sex positivity would note that fleeting sexual encounters (i.e. “hook ups”) have affective strength that ought to be valorized.
failure to achieve normative intimacy yet again. He notes, “it was all fun and going on dates with boys and now I feel like it’s taken me to a dark place that I’m not happy with. I won’t be surprised if I don’t hear from the Canadian again. Who is that person? And why is he rearing his ugly head?”

Facing the failure to achieve normative intimacy, he is presented with the obstacle to flourish, yet at the same time he remains in pursuit of it. The relation then, is cruel, where he is sustained by remaining in the relation which antagonizes and impedes his possibilities to flourish. Since queer liberal subject seeks recognition by the state without attending to its violent operations, Joel as the queer liberal subject seeks recognition in the pursuit of normative intimacy without the possibility of attending to a more radical critique which may offer more sustaining opportunities. Although Joel’s storyline ends without resolution as he faces the failure to (again) properly incorporate, he begins to a line of questioning that may gesture toward a more radical critique that questions the subjects of queer subjectivity itself and its limits. Unhappy with himself, he asks, “who is that person,” questioning the subjectivity conditioned by the pursuit of normative intimacy. Although Joel never answers the question in this episode, his storyline concludes with a cliffhanger with an evaluation that such subjectivity is “ugly,” suggesting the possibility that the cruel relation can be exited and that there is a desire to do so. While the usage of the application is conditioned by the pursuit of queer liberal subjectivity, the process of using the application may open up ways to interrogate the very conditions of normativity and thereby reimagine minoritized subjectivities. Whether Joel follows through with this moment of possibility and emergence is discussed in the finale.

In the finale, epilogues the characters encountering (racialized, bodily) friction on Grindr propose their strategies to continue on with life in the face of the persistent failure to achieve and
embodies normative intimacy. Joel notes the application catalyzed two different types of Joels – one who uses the application and one who doesn’t and that he dislikes the “Joel who uses Grindr”. While the end of the Joel-centric episode notes that he was on the verge of interrogating a more radical politics regarding intimacy and the conditions of queer subjecthood, where the “ugliness” can offer a method to disidentify with the normative investments in proper intimacy and its attendant recognitions, Joel is drawn away from this possibility by choosing to delete the app. Although it is not the deletion of the app which forecloses this opportunity, Joel notes that it is “me reverting back to who I was before the app before I even existed” – that is, erasing a more ugly, possibly radical Joel in pursuit of the queer liberal subject.

For the character Justin, who was featured in the episode centered on his racialized experiences identifying as Asian, his conclusion leads him to accept racialized exclusion as a term that cannot be interrogated or reconditioned. While Justin notes that this stuff “doesn’t register anymore,” he chooses to not “take things personally in Grindr.” Thus, the conditions of racism that undergird interaction on Grindr are recoded as something personal, which cannot and will not be legislated and must therefore be disregarded.

As a concluding note for the series, the Grindr Guide ends by admonishing “its instant nature” for “highlighting existing flaws in society” but that users “adopt the application with aplomb” and that the preoccupation with Grindr (that is, with queer liberalism) is “more than just a one night stand”. Intimacy here then is with the promise of queer liberalism itself and the optimism that consistently animates users to remain attached to its app and the attendant possibilities of queer state recognition. The Grindr moment positions queer subjects within queer liberalism, whether the application is used or not. Though the phenomena may highlight existing
flaws (that is, regarding race, gender, sexuality, and class), the Guide seeks to discipline these unruly operations and does so by realigning queerness with the liberal subject.

As the Grindr Guide is unafraid to present unruly intimacies as a reality that *Grindr* enables, the Guide simultaneously operates to discipline its radical possibilities, upholding the queer liberal subject even if it does not directly seek incorporation through claims to marriage. In contrast, the case of Yuval and Liran, a gay Israeli couple, serves to demonstrate the dream of proliferating intimacies through normative investment in marriage, family, and domesticity. While the characters in the Grindr Guide meet failure to achieve normative intimacies and navigate queer liberal subjectivity accordingly, Yuval and Liran face failure to be recognized by states who do not meet their demand to adopt a child and facilitates a global vision of queer liberalism. Here, I read Grindr’s backing of Yuval and Liran’s case as an example of *Grindr* attempting to present the proper form of intimacy while disciplining unruly ones.

Yuval and Liran

“Yuval and Liran need help with their surrogacy dream. Their government sent them false leads and dead ends that cost them thousands and put their dreams of fatherhood on hold. They have decided to continue to pursue their dream but need a helping hand. You can help by donating to their dream and sharing the story. Also, for the next week, 100% of Grindr Xtra revenue from new subscribers will be donated to Yuval and Liran.”20

-Grindr4Equality.com

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The case of gay Israeli couple Yuval and Liran exemplifies the will to discipline the intimate life of queer subjects. As two white-passing, attractive, muscular men, Yuval and Liran are presented as an acceptable homonormative image of proper intimacy that social media can bolster. After reading their story, Grindr CEO Joel Simkhai felt compelled to dedicate an entire week of funds to their effort.

Figure 1: Yuval and Liran enlist the help of celebrities and the international public to fundraise money for adoption. Screenshot from their video.

In a video released to the Internet public, Yuval and Liran present their story: in their 12 years of couplehood (7 of which were bound in marriage) they now seek to adopt a child. However, since their marriage has no legality in their home country of Israel, the state has redirected their efforts to make it nearly impossible for them to adopt a child. This case
highlights the inadequacy of marriage in itself to demand the homonormative subject; the demand of a child must be met in order for productive capacities of homonormativity. Their efforts are disciplined across heterogeneous intimacies – surrogacy, adoption, non-monogamous relationality – but the discursive economy in which they and Grindr 4 Equality enters them redirects attention solely to the normative investment in a nuclear family without an interrogation of the conditions in which they pursue this homonormative goal colluding with normative domesticity and proper intimacies.

In their appeal, they perform their homonormativity by noting the virtual similarity to an imagined heteronormative international public whose money they demand. They write that they are “almost like any straight, married couple” and that like any couple “we dreamed, fulfilled, hurt…we also dream to start a family.” Thus, the only difference they posit in their attempts to fulfill the homonormative dream is that of their sexuality – race and class are exceeded as their middle-class whiteness operates to facilitate movement across state borders in order to achieve normative domesticity.

They note their gendered lack of capacity to do so, noting that the turn to adoption was predicated on the obvious fact that “neither of us has a uterus.” Where anatomy failed the will to homonormativity, Yuval and Liran then are entered in the political-legal entanglement of international adoption laws as they turn to the agency to supplement their lack. As this too fails them since Guatemala declined their year-long quest to adoption (although this is not interrogated in their appeal, it is presumed that the reason was their homosexuality), the nation (their home country of Israel in addition to all of the nations which failed to meet their demand

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21 Though the video is presented in Hebrew, an English transcript of their video is available here: <http://lybio.net/liran-and-yuval-we-want-a-child/people/>

22 The couple also notes that they adopted a dog before deciding to adopt a child.
for a child) is ironically posited as the site of incommensurability at the very moment that they seek incorporation into it through the fulfillment of the dream to “start a family”. However, an interrogation of national culture and the conditions of homonormativity are not questioned as Yuval and Liran continue to turn their search for a child across more unruly and unstable forms of intimacies.

The second course of action involved disrupting their monogamous structure. Here, they attempted to have a child “with a single woman and raising together”, but this mode of unruly intimacy failed as they “realized it’s too hard for us to add a 3rd person into our relationship”; they then turned to the US in order to pursue surrogacy after numerous gifts and loans from their parents. This too failed when their surrogate had an abortion. Although an interrogation of this moment could provide fruitful ground to think through the neoliberalism and the conditions of gendered, racialized affective labor involved in surrogacy, the ethical call to action remains squarely within the terrain of queer liberal incorporation as the couple now calls to the public to raise money in order to have a child.

Simkhai highlights the animating capabilities of the couple’s story, noting that he felt moved by their “universal” search for love and family that every couple ought to be afforded and thus Grindr For Equality would be taking up their case by mobilizing their global gay polity in order to contribute to their campaign. Where nations disallow the couple from achieving normative domesticity (thereby positing these nations as illiberal), they appeal to Grindr and its digital fiction of a modern liberal gay polity in order to supplement their claims to recognition. Sexuality is mobilized to usher in global liberalism and critique those who cannot fulfill its demands to recognition and incorporation while making hidden the minoritized, gendered
subjects of affective labor that the will to normative domesticity and queer liberalism necessitates.

With banners of handsome white gay male couples in wedding suits decorating their website, *Grindr*’s active endorsement of Yuval and Liran’s campaign is symptomatic of the proper queer subjectivity which the app seeks to forward in order to discipline the unruly intimacies exposed in the *Grindr Guide*. The equality that the campaign seeks to forward then is one of state incorporation or recognition that even exceeds state laws itself, thereby globally importing a vision of disciplinary normativity and domesticity. The methods that Yuval and Liran seek in order to achieve the normative vision of family remain uninterrogated, reducing the claim to queer proliferation to one of queer liberal subjectivity wrought at the expense of other minoritized subjects across the world.

Though gay social networking may open up ways to think through the positions and stakes of minoritized subjects made marginal by globalized queer liberalism, the endorsement of Yuval and Liran’s quest to achieve the vision of normative family and domesticity is symptomatic of the application’s will to discipline the possibilities of queer politics. Where characters in the Grindr Guide may approach the question of how queer liberal subjectivity is shaped, as Joel fails to achieve the vision of normative intimacy and Justin through his experiences with racialization, Grindr For Equality recasts call to queer political mobilization to one sustained by claims to incorporation and recognition via practices of normative domesticity. *Grindr*’s endorsement of the campaign highlights the proper queer subject marked as a globally liberal one, where the animating capacities of “love” is understood to be an investment in normative family practices and domesticity. Not only are these visions articulated nationally, but its geolocational capacities which constructs and visualizes populations across national
boundaries within reach import this vision as a universal one. Where “love” is constructed flatten difference, this move forecloses the possibility of questioning the conditions that recognition entails and against which subjects they must be wrought over. Where queer liberalism produces subjects which may engage in unruly forms of intimacy under the rubric of proliferate choices, it simultaneously seeks to discipline these subjects by positing proper forms of intimacy at the cost of marginalized gendered and racialized subjects in contradistinction to these dangerous intimacies.
Conclusion.

Noncorrespondance and Queer Coalition

Though a vision of digital utopia was narrated to usher in a post-racial, post-gender society, a genealogy of the Internet situated in its neoliberal conditions notes that it relies on the rearticulation of difference in order to accumulate data, metadata, and finance. Reassembling the field of visuality, the interface of the *Grindr* moment operates to shift the rhetoric of queer subjectivities towards that of life by marginalizing the conditions of death. Queer subjectivity conditioned by a homogenizing visions of life, thereby restricting political possibilities towards those disciplined by queer liberalism. Although the interface requires an ever-populated marketplace of user/producers in order to sustain itself, it must discipline the possibilities of intimacy (and thus queer subjectivity) enabled by the marketplace so as to not threaten the queer liberal order. Similarly, as racialized queer of color violence lingers as that which cannot be seen/scened on the interface, the interface renders difference as a category of aesthetics which cannot constitute political subjectivity and proper sociality.

As an interrogation of the interface demonstrates, visuality constructs difference as purely an aesthetic quality. For Mirzoeff, asserting the “right to look” is the defiance of authority’s claims to visuality, thereby serving as a strategy and method to reconstruct social problems and relations of minoritized subjectivities. As Mirzoeff situates the emergence and techniques of visuality as one embedded in histories of war, violence, capitalism and its demand for black slave labor in order to construct the modern nation, attention to visuality today must be understood as an extension of these projects and its racialized, sexualized, and gendered labor
processes. How might one assert the right to look in defiance of the interface and queer liberalism?

Kara Keeling’s “I=Another: Digital Identity Politics” delineates the possibilities for the right to look in politics of resistance within digital visual culture and film. Though Nakamura makes present the invisible bodies of racialized, gendered labor which operates through/against digital and visual capitalism, Keeling considers how formulas of appropriation proliferated by digital identity politics can allude to the promise of a more radical future in the face of neoliberal logics of freedom. Though representation is troubled, Keeling notes that “the content of that representation is the relationships digital identity politics orchestrate, express, and make perceptible” where digital identity politics can and do “gesture toward a noncorrespondance between competing regimes and the valorization of something different that can be perceived in the interval, gap, or break between them” (Keeling 2013). Here, I have situated my project in search of said noncorrespondance in the digital identity politics which cohere in gay social networking apps and the discourse it generates. Returning to the politics of visibility and intimacy that I have traced, digital campaigns which operate under visibility and intimacy (where what must be visible is the formulation of a homonormative gay couple/family against the excessively sexual body though both are structured by neoliberal logics of modern queer personhood) operates under the model of correspondence which Keeling writes against. The challenge I seek to take up in future projects is to search for the promise of the radical within the formula of I=another. What I have done here is to elucidate how “I consumes another” within the construction of normative gay subjecthood, as expressed by the characters in the *Grindr Guide* and Yuval and Liran’s case for adoption.
Queer subjectivities and digital culture are both mobilized to construct, uphold, and repair the modern nation under the vexed rubrics of freedom, rights, and democracy as demonstrated by the *Grindr Guide* and Yuval and Liran. However, as authors such as Reddy (2011) and Nakamura (2007) note, race and gender remain as that which remind us of the kind of labor that capital creates and demands in pursuit of a modern personhood and national culture. As Chun (2006) and Van Dijck (2013) note, the digital and its infrastructure must be viewed as part of the genealogy of a neoliberal nation instead of operating against it as utopian literature on the Internet suggests. Discourse generated by gay social networking apps reminds us about the bodies marked by difference located in and through the networked human-digital body, where racialized and gendered realities cannot be ignored. Simultaneously, as mainstream queer politics then locates possibilities for liberation within a politics of visibility and intimacy to remedy these critiques, it too has difficulty articulating a vision of queer life which does not divorce itself from historical conditions as a mode of repairing the modern nation, which Reddy critiques and Maillard and Villazor make evident (2012). Keeling, however, notes that a politics of noncorrespondance makes the possibility of a radical politics possible even within these parameters of appropriation and digital identity politics (2011).

Nakamura’s analysis of the Asian iPhone Girls in “Economies of Digital Production in East Asia: iPhone Girls and the Transnational Circuits of Cool” (2011) provides a possibility to reassert the right to look in the contemporary moment of disciplinary visuality. The iPhone Girls refer to a candid set of photos that unexpectedly appeared on a Western customer’s new iPhone. The photos depicted the Chinese female factory workers who had assembled that iPhone in different cute and silly poses. Nakamura asserts that these photos rupture the discursive economy of “empowered making” that the fetish of a creative commodity like the iPhone circulates. As the
iPhone’s exorbitant prices are sustained by its circulation as “a productivity device rather than a frivolous decoration”, the image of the laborer which assembled the physical parts of the iPhone in the face of real conditions of exploitation and immanent death are complicated (Nakamura 2011). The user/producer of the cultural/creative commodity then confronts that racialized and gendered conditions of its production, thereby assembling another sphere of visuality that is both mundane and fantastic – both of which are unexpected. As Nakamura notes, attention to these images then calls attention to the digital-industrial complex of the factory (managed by Foxconn) itself, which has a history of poor working conditions, suicide, and violence.

Reassembling and disidentifying with the mundane, everyday operations of the Grindr moment may then unlock unruly intimacies and subjectivities in defiance of queer liberalism and homonormativity. Attending to the cultural politics of the satellite and geolocationality may provide ways to think through the military-industrial complex and its operations of ever-present war around the world. Interrogating the interface and its visions of proliferation calls attention to ways in which bodies made absent in order to make other bodies present. Noting the affective potential in racialized and ugly encounters in the face of failing to achieve normative intimacies may enable a way to disrupt its relation of cruel optimism. Though the vision of the digital and its enabling technologies seeks to flatten and depoliticize difference, a reassembly of the field of visuality thereby reasserts the right to look, exposing the ruptures and contradictions of queer liberalism.
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